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ABSTRACT

The following courses of study in French at the primary level are described and evaluated: (1) "En Avant" (E. J. Arnold, 1966), (2) "Repondez s'il vous plait" (Copp Clark, 1975), (3) "Pour les Tous Petits" (Carleton Board of Education, 1974), (4) "Dansons la Capucine (Clarke Irwin, 1973), and (5) "Le Francais Partout: Aux Yeux des Petits" (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971). These courses have played a role in the tremendous expansion of French study in Ontario schools. Criteria for evaluation of such materials are briefly set forth. (JB)

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SOME RECENT FRENCH COURSES: KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 3

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The early introduction of French as a second language in Ontario schools received a considerable re-emphasis with the 1974 publication of the Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Teaching of French. The Committee's first recommendation was "that French be introduced at the Kindergarten, Primary, or at the latest, the Junior level, and that from whatever level it is introduced, a carefully articulated program be provided to the end of the secondary level."

This is not to say that French in the early grades is new in Ontario. Most notably, Ottawa and Carleton area schools boards have been experimenting with basic variations on early start French programmes for a number of years. These programmes which normally begin in kindergarten vary according to the amount of time and the approach to the teaching of French. The time given to French each day varies from 20 to 40 minutes, 60 to 90 minutes, 50% of the school day, to the whole school day. The approach to the teaching is in step with the time factor. In the 20 to 40 minutes a day programme, French is taught as a subject (core French), in the 60 to 90 minutes programme, French is also used in the teaching of one or more school subjects (extended French) and finally, when French is used as the language of instruction 50% to 100% of the school day, the programme is known as partial or full immersion respectively.

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Although some boards have implemented partial and total immersion programmes in the early grades and others are making efforts to introduce such programmes, core French (20 to 40 minutes per day) is still by far the most widely accepted approach to the teaching of French at the primary level. Even in the extended French programmes (which achieved a good measure of success in the Ottawa area), core French is an important component, since an extended programme usually

consists of French as a subject as well as French as the medium of instruction for the teaching of another school subject.

It is evident that different types of teaching materials are needed to suit the varying objectives of these different programmes. There are as yet few generally available published materials produced specifically for immersion and extended programmes: textual material produced in France or Quebec for francophones are usually adapted by the classroom teacher. A descriptive and evaluative checklist of materials used in immersion classes at the kindergarten and grade one levels in some Ontario schools has been compiled in draft form.

The intention of this article is to describe and compare the main features of the more recent and innovative courses which have been produced chiefly to meet the needs of French core programmes introduced at the Kindergarten to grade 3 levels.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

What criteria can be used to examine courses? One approach would be to view them in the light of the Ministry's curriculum guidelines. However, although some preliminary work has been done, such guidelines for French programmes from K-6 have not yet been prepared. There is no simple guide to course examination. Nevertheless, some suggestions are given on points to consider, with illustrations from a few courses.

A French course for young children should offer a gentle introduction to the language, enjoyment in being involved in a language experience and a desire to communicate in the language.

The overall linguistic objective is to secure the understanding of a number of appropriately selected sentence patterns and vocabulary items and the ability to use actively a more limited number of these patterns and vocabulary. In the courses described below the selection and gradation of vocabulary and structures ranges from very systematic in En Avant, Aux Yeux des Petits to more casual in Dansons la Capucine and Pour les Tout Petits where the teacher selects freely from a wide variety of stories, comptines, songs, etc..on which to base his lesson.

It is considered important to present the language in situational contexts,

and to provide opportunities for the students to use the language in dialogues, games, songs, etc...appropriate for their age. These activities should be adaptable to large groups, small groups and individuals. All the courses described provide a rich and imaginative variety of stimulating language activities. The two most comprehensive courses, R.S.V.P. 1 and En Avant offer the most explicit suggestions as to how different activities can be adapted to various types of learning situations.

It is a great asset if the course includes a variety of appropriate audio-visual aids to assist the teacher in presenting the programme simply and interestingly. The only drawback to a good selection of audio-visual aids is their high cost. Pour les Tout Petits provides only hand-drawn photocopied illustrations. Teachers and students supply other needed support material. This requires more time, effort and imagination of the teacher. On the other hand, En Avant, Aux Yeux des Petits and R.S.V.P. 1 provide ample high quality figurines, flashcards, posters, etc.

Cultural information can either be given explicitly or it can be incorporated in the situations, dialogues, stories, etc. In this respect, there is wide variation among courses. En Avant, being British in origin, gives background information about France and French customs and uses situations and dialogues to illustrate the life of French people. No information pertinent to French Canada or North America is given. On the other hand, some of the booklets which make up Dansons la Capucine are on Canadian themes: la coupe Stanley, la tire. The situations in R.S.V.P. 1 are North American, the intention being to present French in a context familiar to the students, leaving out cultural differences.

The accepted order of introduction of the four skills is listening, repeating/speaking, reading, copying/writing. Their spacing varies in the K-3 group according to the grade level for whom the course is intended. In kindergarten and grade one, listening and repeating are fostered by providing interesting listening materials. When French is introduced at the grade 3 level, many teachers successfully use reading and copying as activities supporting the listening and speaking skills. For example, the course R.S.V.P. 1 incorporates reading and copying from the first unit. On the other hand, the British course En Avant, Stage 1 is purely oral. This aspect of En Avant has come under criticism by many Ontario users of the course.

The efficacy of any instructional programme depends to a large extent on the teacher. It is, therefore, essential that he is well informed about the aims of the course and its pedagogical procedures. Sample lesson plans with suggested teaching techniques, viable suggestions for adapting the materials to different teaching situations (e.g. varying class lengths, ability groups), and lists of vocabulary and sentence patterns, are invaluable particularly to the less experienced teacher. All the courses described here contain instructions for the teacher, but the teacher's guides of En Avant and Aux Yeux des Petits are the clearest and easiest to follow.

However, it is impossible for a course to be fully adjusted to ever-changing patterns of education, evolving ideas on language and its acquisition, and the variety of situations in which it is likely to be used.

FRENCH COURSES, LEVELS K-3

En Avant Stage 1A
Nuffield Foundation
E.J. Arnold, 1966 (Distributed by J.M. Dent in Canada)
Complete Kit - $149.00; Teacher's Book - $10.40

En Avant is a high quality sequential programme devised for schools in Great Britain, extending over approximately 9 years of study of French as a foreign language. The carefully planned and integrated materials comprising this programme were designed by a well-balanced team, and tested in about 200 British schools where regular classroom teachers without special training have had good results. Stage 1A introduces the sequence at approximately the grade 3 level.

En Avant, Stage 1A consists of a teacher's book, flannelgraph figurines, flash-cards, wall-charts and recorded material. There is no student book or workbook. A testing kit is available separately.

This course is divided into an introductory unit, followed by 20 units which include 2 revision units.

A typical unit consists of cultural background information (in English), presentation of new sentence patterns, questions and dialogues on the patterns, presentation of vocabulary (in context), use of vocabulary in situations, patterns and vocabulary acted out in a scene, a stimulating variety of activities (songs,

games, drawing, etc.), and taped exercises.

The linguistic objective of this course is to secure good control of a carefully selected number of sentence patterns and vocabulary items by means of their active use in short dialogues, songs, games, etc. These activities engage only the listening and speaking skills. Many teachers currently using this programme feel that an earlier introduction to reading and writing would be helpful.

Background information about France and French life is given with each unit. Many of the situations and dialogues also illustrate the habits and customs of French people. Not surprisingly, there are no references to Canadian culture.

An outstanding characteristic of this programme is the excellent teacher's book. It gives detailed explanation of the structure and aims of the course, a description of the components, full lesson plans for each unit including instructions on the use of the visual aids and an index of the sentence patterns and vocabulary of this Stage. The teacher's book also suggests how this programme can be adapted to classes of varied lengths and mixed ability. In practice, however, En Avant, is better suited to the 30 minute class length than to the 20 minute class.

A revised En Avant, Stage 1 (1974) has been published. It combines Stages 1A & B in order that the complete Stage may be taught in one year if desired.

This revised kit contains more visual and less taped material than the original one, and more possibilities for individual and group work. The new teacher's book is even more precise than the former one, making it possible to 'take in' an area of work at a glance with essential activities clearly distinguished from optional ones.

Répondez s'il vous plaît 1: Allons-y!
D.A. Massey, Sister R.M. McLean, C. Bick, D. Scuccato
Copp Clark, 1975
Complete Kit - $276.00; Pupil's Book - $4.25; Teacher's Book - $25.00

Allons-y!, level 1 of R.S.V.P. is the most recently published Canadian course for young learners of French as a second language. It is intended for beginners at approximately the grade 3 level, and together with 9 subsequent levels which

are still in production, it is planned as a sequential program to be completed in grade 12.

The complete R.S.V.P. 1 teaching kit includes a teacher's manual, student's book, flash cards, number cards, work sheets, story boards, figurines, puppets and recorded material.

This carefully composed and extensively classroom tested course consists of 15 units with a different theme for each, and 3 additional units dealing with seasons to be used at the appropriate time. Every 4th unit is for review.

A typical unit consists of new vocabulary and structures presented by the teacher in 3 dramatic situations, questions on the situations, aural and oral games and exercises, discussions of the situations, mathematical exercises, a song, reading and related exercises, activities and a progress test.

The cultural context of the situations of each unit is North American. No features illustrative of French or French Canadian life have been highlighted. Rather than stress cultural differences, the authors have aimed to present the target language in contexts familiar to the students.

Although quite explicit, the lesson plans in the teacher's book are somewhat hard to follow.

R.S.V.P. 1 has several innovative features:

Although listening and speaking are emphasized, reading and copying are used in each unit to reinforce aural oral activities.

The student is involved in the learning process by an explicit statement (in English) in his book of what he will be able to do on completion of each unit, e.g. "ask and tell what the weather is like," "multiply with numbers from zero to fifty."

Provision is made for individual and group work particularly in the review units, by means of a wide range of exercises and activities at varying levels of difficulty from which the teacher can select appropriately.

The use of English is not avoided. It is used in the student's book to give the aims of the unit, to describe the situations in each unit, to suggest items students might bring to class and to give instructions for the exercises.

Pour les Touts Petits
Carleton Board of Education. Revised Edition, 1974.
$9.00

Pour les Tout Petits is a compendium of materials for the teaching of French as a second language at the kindergarten and grade one level produced by a committee of teachers in the Ottawa-Carleton area under the chairmanship of Marguerite Travers.

The 600 loose leaf pages in a 3 ring binder contain a very brief introduction giving overall aims, 3 suggested lesson plans, and ideas on how to teach fairy tales. There follows an illustrated collection of 68 comptines, 10 dialogues, 10 games, 27 songs and 23 fairy tales.

This rich collection of carefully selected and engaging materials does not claim to be a course, but a resource from which a teacher can create his own programme. Its purpose is to promote positive attitudes toward French and a mastery of the sound system through interesting and pleasurable activities which stress listening and encourage imitating. The acquisition of structures and vocabulary is not emphasized beyond a basic minimum.

Although the selection of materials is outstanding, in order to make his class successful, the teacher must prepare very carefully. For instance, to present a fairy tale, the teacher should learn it, be prepared to dramatize it, colour and mount the illustrative pictures provided in the binder and gather other props such as puppets.

This unstructured approach to the teaching of French is more likely to be successful in the hands of an experienced elementary teacher. In Carleton schools, teachers receive in-service training to help them use these materials.

Dansons la Capucine
Annick Le Marchand
Clarke Irwin, 1973.
Complete Kit - $45.00

Although it can be used as a course, this set of beautifully illustrated booklets is primarily a very rich collection of stories, well suited to the

interest level of children from kindergarten to grade 2.

Dansons la Capucine consists of 27 colourful story books grouped into 3 levels of difficulty, a teacher's guide, 3 lesson plan booklets and 2 records. A picture edition of the storybooks in which the words of the dialogues and songs are omitted is also available.

Each book is self-contained and can be used independently of the series. The teacher is encouraged to expand, shorten or modify the stories to suit her programme. The storybooks can also be used as the basis of a loosely structured course covering three years of study. The teacher organizes the course by deciding the sequence in which to use the booklets within each of the 3 levels of difficulty.

The teacher's guide contains directions on how to develop a story, the text of the stories, lists of structures and vocabulary, and games, songs and nursery rhymes to enrich the stories. This guide is not simple to follow. To get the most benefit out of it requires careful study. Lesson plan booklets to be used in conjunction with the teacher's book were published in 1975. The procedure they outline for each story consists of an introduction to the vocabulary and structures, games, songs and other activities to reinforce language items, followed by page by page reading, explaining and 'exploitation' of the story.

Some of the stories are timeless French tales: Le petit chaperon rouge, Le roi Dagobert. Other stories are specifically Canadian: La goutte de sirop d'érable, Le flocon magique. These stories have been effectively simplified without loss of narrative interest.

This outstanding collection of stories is generally found to be most successfully used in immersion programmes and as enrichment material in core programmes.

Le Français Partout: Aux Yeux des Petits
Marthe G. Laurin
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.
Complete Kit - $119.96; Teacher's Text - $6.36; Pupil's Activity Pad - $2.36

Aux Yeux des Petits is a one year course in French as a second language suitable for kindergarten or grade one. It introduces French through a

variety of activities, while assuring that the children learn a basic repertoire of vocabulary, structures, songs and comptines.

It consists of a teacher's text with an introduction to the course and daily lesson plans, a pupil's activity pad for individual seat work such as connecting dots, colouring, cut-outs, etc...and a classroom kit. This kit contains about 100 colour cut-outs (to illustrate dialogues), a 'rug' with 16 clear vinyl pockets (to insert the cut-outs for display), 14 large posters (to illustrate songs, scenes, etc.) and recordings of script and songs.

This oral programme which uses French exclusively allows for a few weeks of listening, not insisting on imitation or answer, with songs and games forming the basis of each lesson. After this, the script of each lesson (dialogue or scenetes based on the activities of a family with 3 children) introduces new vocabulary and structures systematically. The scripts are centred on various basic themes: colours, numbers, family members, rooms of the house, fruits, animals and foods. These themes are supported by various activities.

The songs and comptines are of French and French-Canadian origin.

The teacher's book is thorough and detailed, outlining each daily 15-20 minute lesson under the following headings: teaching aids and suggestions; teacher's script; songs, games, rhymes, comptines; review.

The explicitness of the teacher's book and the wealth of supporting materials make this course very accessible to the relatively inexperienced elementary French teacher. An experienced teacher may find it somewhat prescriptive.

The Modern Language Centre of OISE has a teaching materials collection which teachers can visit. Here they can examine a variety of courses for all levels, including all of the above-mentioned ones, and discuss them with the librarian.

It is not possible, however, to evaluate a course on the basis of inspection alone. Their strengths and weaknesses become apparent only as one works with them. The question is further complicated by the unpredictable nature of student

response. It is therefore desirable for someone choosing a new course to observe it in use and discuss it with teachers who have had experience with it. Although courses intended for the K to grade 3 levels vary in many of their features, we are fortunate that they are of such high overall quality.